



HELLENIC LINK-MIDWEST
A SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL LINK WITH GREECE
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Keeping Greek Alive Abroad: Why Speaking the Language Still Matters in the Diaspora

On Sunday, February 22, 2026, Hellenic Link-Midwest will present Professor Zoe Gavriilidou, in a lecture titled *"Keeping Greek Alive Abroad: Why Speaking the Language Still Matters in the Diaspora"*. The event will take place at 3:00 pm at the lecture hall of The Holy Taxiarchai and Saint Haralambos Greek Orthodox Church, 7373 N Caldwell Ave, Niles, Illinois. Admission is free.

For Greeks of the diaspora, learning to speak Greek is far more than an educational choice—it is an act of cultural continuity. Greek is the medium through which family memory, shared values, humor, emotion, and collective identity are transmitted across generations. Spoken Greek sustains intergenerational bonds, connects diaspora communities to their historical and cultural heritage, and enables meaningful participation in Greek-speaking spaces, both local and transnational.

Yet, maintaining Greek as a living, spoken language outside Greece is increasingly challenging. Dominant societal languages, limited exposure beyond the family domain, fragmented educational provision, and the pressure to assimilate often lead to passive understanding rather than active use. Heritage speakers frequently struggle with confidence, literacy, and the feeling of linguistic “in-betweenness,” while families and institutions face time constraints, uneven resources, and shifting language ideologies.

This lecture argues that supporting spoken Greek in the diaspora requires moving beyond nostalgia toward inclusive, flexible, and identity-affirming language practices. Addressing the challenges of heritage language maintenance is essential not only for preserving Greek itself, but for empowering diaspora Greeks to speak, belong, and be heard in their full linguistic and cultural complexity.

Zoe Gavriilidou holds a BA in Philology from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and a PhD from Université Paris 13. She is Professor of Linguistics at Democritus University of Thrace and has recently served as Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago. She has held several senior academic leadership roles, including Chair of the Department of Greek Philology, Dean of the School of Classics and Humanities, and Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs and Student Welfare. She has played a key role in national curriculum reform for language and literature within Greece’s “New School – School of the 21st Century” initiative. In 2022, she completed the curriculum for teaching Greek as a Heritage Language in the United States, commissioned by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Her scholarly work includes 11 books, over 140 journal articles, and 25 edited volumes. A former President of the European Association for Lexicography, she has extensive experience in vocabulary teaching and dictionary use in education. Equally committed to public humanities, she actively works with schools and educators in Greece and the U.S., and her recent work focuses on AI literacy and curriculum design for the school of the future.

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